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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000432

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SUBJECT: MINISTRY OF TOURISM OUT OF THE LOOP ON TIP ISSUES

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT R. DOWNES
FOR REASON 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. During a March 26 meeting with Ministry of Tourism officials to discuss trafficking in persons (TIP), the Director of the International Relations Office told Poloff that the government has not given the ministry a mandate to combat trafficking. However, she expressed interest in lobbying the ministry to consider addressing this issue. Tourism officials also relayed details of one potential case of sex tourism in Margarita Island. Separately, Marie Borregales, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Desk Officer for North America, said she has been unable to secure statistics on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's (BRV's) TIP law enforcement efforts. It is noteworthy that BRV officials are willing to engage us on TIP issues given the current bilateral relationship. However, the BRV's inability to acquire data on its law enforcement efforts or unwillingness to share that information with Embassy officials makes it difficult for us to access whether progress has been made in this area. End Summary.

Tourism Ministry Doesn't Do TIP

¶2. (C) Poloff met March 26 with three Ministry of Tourism officials to discuss the Department's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report as well as the ministry's role in combating trafficking. Meeting participants included Maria Carlotta Carreno, Director of the International Relations Office, Richard Pofa, Director General of Tourism Services, and Sobeida Hurtado of the Quality Controls Office. MFA U.S. Desk Officer Marie Borregales also attended the meeting.

¶3. (C) Carreno told Poloff the ministry has not been tasked with addressing TIP issues. She noted, however, that after Embassy officials requested the meeting she lobbied the Minister of Tourism to consider forming a pilot TIP office within Carreno's department. The minister has not responded to Carreno's request. Regarding progress on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's (BRV's) national plan of action to combat TIP, Carreno said she was unfamiliar with the plan because ministry officials do not sit on the committee charged with drafting it. Poloff suggested it might be beneficial for tourism officials to be represented in the group. Carreno said she would recommend that the ministry be added to that working group. Borregales seconded the idea, saying the MFA might be able to assist them in the process.

¶ 4. (C) Poba and Hurtado were familiar with one potential TIP case in 2008. The case purportedly involved a commercial which aired in London and advertised a hotel on Margarita Island as a sex tourism establishment. The commercial reportedly featured adolescent girls. BRV authorities were alerted and planned to investigate the matter, but the hotel owners abandoned the establishment before officials arrived to question them. Hurtado, whose five-person office inspects and certifies that tourist resorts in Venezuela are operating legally, noted that due to limited resources her office only investigates questionable establishments when someone reports an incident or when ministry officials are tipped off.

G/TIP Request for LE Data

¶ 5. (C) Regarding G/TIP's request for statistics on the BRV's law enforcement efforts for inclusion in the 2007 TIP report, Borregales said she has been unable to acquire the data from the Ministry of Interior and Justice (MIJ). The MIJ, specifically the Criminal Investigations Unit (CICPC), is aware of the Department's deadline for submission of data. Poloff's request for a follow-up meeting with CICPC officials to discuss statistics on prosecutions and/or convictions as well as the government's victim assistance programs has not been granted.

¶ 6. (C) Comment. Ministry of Tourism officials readily acknowledged that trafficking is a growing problem in the Caribbean Basin and that Venezuela is not exempt. While they seemed interested in playing a larger role in anti-TIP efforts, they cannot move forward unless the Minister of Tourism or other high-level BRV officials give their consent. Separately, Borregales, our MFA interlocutor, has been able to formalize meetings with BRV officials and initiate dialogue on our trafficking concerns. These meetings are a welcome step forward by the hermetic BRV, but have not led to

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information sharing on the BRV's law enforcement efforts.
End Comment.

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